

THE CUBAN OPERATION

The October-November 1962 Cuban crisis was a major test of the system President Kennedy uses when dealing with national security problems. A description of the Cuban operation may be helpful to those interested in knowing how the President carries out his responsibilities in the national security field.

The first phase of the operation, October 15-20, illustrates the procedures used (a) in getting intelligence to the President and (b) in preparing recommendations to the President for formal consideration and decision.

(a) Photographic evidence of the development of a Soviet offensive missile capability in Cuba reached ranking Government officials late in the evening of October 15. The following morning, before the President began his working day, the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs, McGeorge Bundy, summarized the intelligence community's findings. For the next four weeks, the President received every day, and sometimes twice a day, either written summaries of the photographic "readout" or enlarged pictures of the Soviet missiles and missile sites under construction. During the last two weeks of October, the United States Intelligence Board produced numerous estimates covering many subjects such as the impact in Latin America and worldwide of the deployment to Cuba

of Soviet offensive weapons.

(b) The planning of the U.S. response to the mounting evidence of the Soviet missile deployment began Tuesday morning. Already available to the group of Cabinet-level officials who undertook this task were preliminary studies of possible courses of action. During four days, October 16-19, these officials, sometimes meeting off-the-record with the President, but more often in the State Department, defined the problem and alternative ways of dealing with it including lists of political, military and economic actions to be taken under each alternative. The group included the Vice President, the Secretaries of State, Defense and Treasury, the Attorney General, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Director of Central Intelligence. Available to each member of this informal group were the planning resources of his agency.

Because the planning had reached the point of Presidential decision and because additional evidence of the rapidity of the Soviet missile build-up was at hand, the group reported to the President who decided to return to Washington on October 20.

The secret National Security Council meeting held in the White House the afternoon of October 20 initiated the second organizational phase of the Cuban crisis. This meeting, presided over by the

President was opened with an oral and visual presentation of the extensive photographic evidence resulting from the increased number of reconnaissance missions flown during the preceeding four days. Papers outlining the alternative responses to the Soviet initiative and including argumentation in support of each were discussed in detail. The President decided to follow the "blockade route" and directed the planning to proceed along this line.

Following an intelligence briefing, the second NSC meeting, held on Sunday, centered around a draft speech in which the President was to inform the American people of the situation and ^{of} his plan of action. Numerous policy decisions were made in the course of drafting the final wording of the speech. A necessarily complex diplomatic plan, including our tactics in the UN, and consulting with the Organization of American States, with NATO and our European Allies, with other Allies, non-committed and neutral nations was presented by the Secretary of State and approved. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs and the Secretary of Defense reviewed military questions and obtained the Presidential decisions they sought.

The third NSC meeting held on October 22 reviewed the military measures taken to place our forces in a posture to respond to any contingency. The objectives of our action were decided upon, the

mechanics of the quarantine were settled, consultation with Congressional leaders and other national leaders was agreed upon and public information guidelines were approved.

The policy having been decided, the Cuban crisis moved into the action phase. To ensure the rapid and coordinated conduct of all operations, the President created the NSC Executive Committee and asked its members to meet with him daily. During the next month, the Executive Committee met 28 times -- once, it met three times during the same day.

The members of the Executive Committee are:

- The Vice President
- The Secretary of State
- The Secretary of Defense
- The Secretary of the Treasury
- The Attorney General
- The Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff
- The Director of Central Intelligence
- The Under Secretary of State
- The Deputy Secretary of Defense
- The Ambassador-at-Large (Thompson)
- The Special Counsel (Sorensen)
- The Special Assistant to the President for
National Security Affairs

The following officials have regularly attended Committee meetings:

- The Director, United States Information Agency
- The Deputy Under Secretary of State (U. Alexis Johnson)
- The Assistant Secretary of Defense (Paul Nitze)

Numerous other officials have attended when problems of primary concern to them were being discussed. Among the were:

Ambassador Stevenson
Mr. John J. McCloy of the US Mission to the UN
The President's Press Secretary
Assistant Secretaries of State for Inter-American
Affairs, for International Organization Affairs,
and for Public Affairs

To facilitate the work of the Executive Committee, three inter-departmental subcommittees were established. The first, chaired by Assistant Secretary of Defense Nitze, worked on Berlin contingencies. The second, chaired by the Chairman of the State Department's Policy Planning Council, Walt W. Rostow, did advance planning. The third, chaired by the Deputy Under Secretary of State for Administration, William H. Orrick, Jr. addressed itself to establishing an effective worldwide communications system to meet the requirements of the Cuban crisis.

The first two subcommittees produced numerous papers which were considered by the Executive Committee. The third subcommittee reported on progress made in overcoming communication inadequacies.

An additional organizational arrangement made by the President was the establishment on October 29 of a coordinating committee to give full time to the matters involved in the conclusion of the Cuban crisis. Mr. John J. McCloy was named Chairman. The other members

of this group were Under Secretary of State Ball and Deputy Secretary of Defense Gilpatric. The group served as a link between the Executive Committee and the negotiations under way in New York with the Russians and the Acting Secretary General of the UN.

Meetings of the Executive Committee usually began with an intelligence briefing by CIA Director McCone/ In addition, the latest intelligence on the Cuban situation was circulated in writing by means of a "Crisis Memorandum" prepared especially for the Executive Committee meeting. The intelligence presentation often gave rise to discussion and questions.

Next on the Committee's agenda was a report by the Secretary of State on political developments. Discussion and Presidential decisions on diplomatic matters usually followed.

Military questions were then raised by the Secretary of Defense. Operational problems involved in carrying out the Cuban quarantine and in conducting aerial reconnaissance were presented and decided.

The remainder of the meeting was spent on a wide variety of problems such as directives to USIA, release of information to the press and civil defense preparations.